CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

Call Center Metrics: Best Practices in Performance Measurement and Management to Maximize Quitline Efficiency and Quality

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ISSUE PAPER OVERVIEW

This paper is designed to outline the most critical metrics for establishing and maintaining Quitline quality, service, and efficiency. The purpose of this paper is to create a shared language for Quitline stakeholders (callers, funders, and service providers) to understand common call center industry metrics and methodologies and how they apply to the unique operations and objectives of the Quitline environment.

This paper includes an overview of call centers, the most common performance metrics, the performance measurement and management process, and best practices for using metrics to improve quality, service, and efficiency in the center.
CALL CENTER METRICS:
BEST PRACTICES IN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND MANAGEMENT TO MAXIMIZE QUITLINE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY

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SECTION 1: THE QUITLINE AS A CALL CENTER

Overview of Call Centers

A call center is defined as a place where contacts are made and received. It is often the “front door” to a business and is the place where most crucial customer interactions take place. Therefore its effective and efficient operation is a key ingredient to the overall success of any organization.

The definition of a call center in its simplest form is “a place where calls are made and received.” The definition increasingly includes mention of the handling of various types of interactions in addition to telephone calls. Therefore, some individuals and organizations use the term “contact center” to refer to the place where these transactions take place. The terms “call center” and “contact center” are used interchangeably, with “call center” being the most commonly used. The term “call center” is more easily understood and for now best represents the proportion of interactions that are indeed carried out by telephone versus other contact channels such as email or web chat. Even with the explosive growth of the Internet and email transactions, telephone calls remain the primary form of communications in the early 21st Century.

In addition to defining a call center as a place for customer interactions, it is important to denote what else makes an entity a call center and not just a place where telephone calls are answered. A call center is typically defined as an operation where more than one person is responding to handle the contacts, and also where the interaction can be handled by anyone within a group. In other words, the call requires a capability and not a specific individual to handle it.

Given the far-reaching definition of what makes up a call center, it is difficult to ascertain precisely how many call centers truly exist. However, since being a call center typically implies having technology to answer and distribute calls. With this definition in mind, there are approximately 80,000 sites using call center related technologies in the United States, another 10,000 in Canada, about 30,000 throughout Europe, and over 20,000 in the Asia-Pacific region with most located in India and The Philippines.

With such a large number of call centers in place, the call center profession is obviously one that employs large numbers of employees. Indeed, based on studies from The Call Center School using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it is estimated that approximately 4.5 million frontline agent positions are active today. Approximately 3 million of these positions are filled by full-time staff and the remaining 1.5 million positions are shared by part-time staff. These millions of call center employees represent approximately 2% of the total United States population and about 3.5% of the working population.

There are many different types, sizes, and functions of call centers handling all sorts of customer contacts. Quitlines represent a unique kind of call center interaction. The calls are not like a reservations center handling a hotel stay or booking a flight, a bank processing a financial transaction, a cellular service company processing a payment, a utility making a collections call, or a catalog center taking an order. However, while quitline call content may be very different from other call centers, the critical components to running a successful quitline operation are much the same as running any type of call center.
Functions of a Call Center

There are six main operational functions in any type of call center:

Workforce Management

Since an incoming call center is at the mercy of incoming calls, the tasks associated with workforce management are among the most important functions of the center. These tasks involve forecasting calls, calculating the optimal number of frontline staff, creating work schedules, and managing daily service levels.

Quality Management

Due to the call center’s role as the primary point for customer communications, it is essential that these interactions be handled with utmost quality. The functions associated with quality management include customer surveying, call monitoring, performance assessment, and coaching.

Technology Management

The call center today is filled with technology. From the moment the customer picks up the phone to the resolution of the call, many different technologies come into play. A critical function in every call center is the effective management of these technologies including acquisition, implementation, and ongoing maintenance and management. These technologies are generally grouped as call delivery (including telecommunications infrastructure), call handling technologies, and call center management tools.

Reporting and Communications

One of the components driving the call center operation is information. An effective flow of communications is needed between customers and the center, between the center and other business units, and within the call center itself. Many different types of reports need to be generated every single day to show performance of the center as well as that of individuals. Therefore, reporting and communications is another essential function of call center operations.

Financial Management

There is an array of costs associated with running a call center operation. And some call centers may be generating revenue of their own as well. The aspects of creating and managing an operating budget and capital budget as well as using financial procedures to evaluate return on investment of proposed technologies or services are part of the financial management function of the call center.

Risk Management

A final function within call center operations is that of disaster recovery and contingency planning. Although not a task that is necessarily performed every day, it is a regular function within the best-run call centers to continually assess risks and potential solutions.

This paper will focus on the specific metrics and the overall performance measurement and management process that ensures quality and efficiency in each of these call center functions.
SECTION 2: PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

There are many different performance measurements that are used to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of the call center operation. Some of these measures are for overall call center performance, while others focus on the individual employee. The main purpose of these performance measures is to ensure the call center is meeting its goals and objectives and that all personnel are living up to their work potential.

The performance measurement process begins with defining performance goals and expectations. These performance objectives for the call center and the employees working in the call center should link to enterprise goals and objectives.

For the call center, there are external measures of performance and internal measures of performance. The key internal indicators of performance are typically categorized into service, quality, efficiency, and profitability measures. These same categories can be used to define team and individual measures of performance.

This section provides an overview of the performance definition and measurement process, including a look at external (customer) measures of performance as well as internal measures. These measures will ascertain how efficiently the call center is using its resources and meeting enterprise and departmental goals, as well as how individuals and teams are performing.

Performance Measurement Strategy

It is critical for every call center operation that supports a Quitline to have a performance measurement and management strategy in place. The old adage “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it” is certainly true when it comes to the call center. A significant amount of information is needed to gauge how the call center, as well as every individual, is performing from an internal operational and external customer perspective.

An effective system of performance measures allows you to do the following:

- Review the call center as a whole.
- Review performance of each employee.
- Analyze performance trends.
- Investigate root cause of problems.
- Optimize use of call center resources.
- Support the call center and company’s strategic plan and objectives.

When setting call center, team, and individual performance goals, it is important to link to the organization’s mission, vision, and goals. A mission statement describes the purpose of the organization. It defines why the association exists, and therefore how it operates and makes decisions. The vision statement for an organization is a bit different in that it describes where the organization wants to be at some point in the future. This vision drives the strategy of the organization as a whole, and certainly should define the strategy and performance goals of the call center, as well as the performance goals and standards for each individual within the organization.
To support a Quitline goal to expand accessibility and increase caller satisfaction and retention/conversion, goals may be set for “one and done” completion by each access channel such as telephone or email, or each team may set goals related to “conversions,” customer satisfaction ratings, or quality scores. Likewise, performance metrics would be defined to gauge how well each team supports the mission and goals.

Another way to think about defining performance measures is to think about what is required to keep the various call center stakeholder groups happy. There can be many different call center stakeholders, but the primary three are customers/callers, the frontline staff, and the providers’ senior management teams. Another approach to understanding performance measures is to think about developing performance measures that gauge how well a call center is keeping these groups satisfied.

For Quitline operations, the “customer” may be defined as the actual caller, but could also be defined as the funder that has hired the provider to supply telephone service to its callers. For purposes of this paper, the “customer” will generally be defined as the caller to the Quitline.

The call center’s performance goals and measures should be balanced among each of the major stakeholders—the customers, the frontline staff, and senior management. The basic concerns of these groups can be used as a structure for defining the key performance indicators in the call center.

Customer Perspectives

An important key to success for a Quitline involves listening to customers to learn how effectively the call center is meeting their needs. There are many different ways to listen and get customer feedback. The three primary ways include:

- Customer surveys
- Customer praise and complaints
- Observation of customer interactions

Customer Surveys

First, it is important for every call center to perform its own surveys in order to understand the perceptions of callers related specifically to call center transactions. While a Quitline funder may perform regular caller satisfaction surveys, these surveys probably focus on products, support services, and a variety of other concerns with the call center experience sometimes buried in the overall questions and scope of the survey. To truly evaluate how effectively the call center is serving callers and representing the Quitline organization, it is crucial to do customer surveys solely focused on the call center experience.

NOTE: Those interested in learning more about developing and administering customer surveys, we recommend two books: Customer Surveying by Dr. Fred Van Bennekom and The Survey Research Handbook by Pamela Alreck and Robert Settle.
Customer Praise and Complaints

The second way to get customer feedback is to encourage open feedback from callers and then pay careful attention to what they say. Complaint calls and letters should be viewed not as a negative, but as an opportunity to build the customer relationship.

According to the book *A Complaint is a Gift* by Janelle Barlow, when customers feel dissatisfied with a product or service, they have two options – they can say something or just go away. If they go away, they give you no opportunity to fix their dissatisfaction. On the other hand, complaining callers are still talking to you, giving you a chance to fix the problem and salvage the relationship so they might keep talking to you. So as much as you may not like to receive negative feedback or criticism, customers who complain can actually be viewed as giving you a gift.

This view of a complaint as a gift starts from the top. The management team’s outlook will be mirrored by the frontline staff. Instead of dreading these types of interactions, the management team needs to communicate that the Quitline welcomes these types of interactions. As a result, employees’ attitudes will change and they will learn not to dread these types of interactions, but to welcome them with open ears.

Of course, not all customer comments are negative. It is just as important to note and celebrate the instances where a caller is delighted. Recognize why the caller was happy with the interaction so those behaviors and processes can be documented and encouraged so the frontline staff will continue those practices over and over again. Communicate these successes throughout the call center so the good performers get the recognition they deserve and others can learn from the positive experiences too.

It is critical for funders and their service providers to establish a clear communications protocol for both praise and complaint communications from callers so that the voice of the customer can be clearly heard and acted upon at all levels.

Observation of Customer Interactions

Sometimes customers do not take the time to participate in a survey or send a letter of praise or complaint. To keep a finger on the pulse of caller interactions every single day, it is critical to monitor and observe calls on a random basis. What is important here is to look for things that define a quality transaction in the eyes of the caller and not just by internal definitions of good service.

That is why surveys are so important – they tell us not only how customers feel about certain aspects of the interaction, but also what things are most important to them. Quitlines should use this information to ensure that what the customer cares about most is reflected in the monitoring and review process. We will talk more about this monitoring process later in this document.

Frontline Staff Perspective

Your business cannot be successful if your employees are unhappy. Just as it is important
to measure how well your call center is doing in the eyes of your callers, it is likewise important to gauge each employee’s level of satisfaction with the job and work environment.

Completion of a regular employee satisfaction survey can provide valuable insight into the current perceptions of the staff. Surveying should be a regular process that allows and encourages each employee to assess immediate supervisors, the management team, work environment, training, job resources, career opportunities, and so on. If there is dissatisfaction with some recent change or process, it is important to find that out as quickly as possible, since dissatisfaction plays a role in how the agent performs on the phone.

While the most effective way to gauge satisfaction of the frontline staff is simply to talk to them regularly, it is also useful to employ some more formal survey processes. Surveys are typically done in writing, with employees providing feedback on an anonymous basis. This “blind” survey ensures an honest feedback opportunity, without fear that the employee will be identified as the one who gave negative input. There are usually ten to fifteen questions, with a scale of choices and a few free-form comment areas too.

This type of survey for employee satisfaction should be done on a regular basis with trend analysis to ensure that the performance and satisfaction is moving in the right direction. If your scores are below expectations, doing a survey every quarter may be needed, while you might survey less frequently if the work environment is stable and scores indicate overall satisfaction. It is important to share the results with your employees so that they know that their input is being heard. Specific suggestions by employees should be addressed, and management’s response shared with all employees.

**Key Performance Indicators**

**Key Performance Indicators – Service Measures**

There are many different measures associated with service delivery in the call center. Some are associated with overall accessibility, while others are related to the speed of the service provided. Most of the service measures are those that gauge how the overall call center is performing. However, some of the measures can also be indirect measures of team or individual performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Measures</th>
<th>Call Center</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blockage</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours of operation</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abandons</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-service availability</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed of Answer</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Service level | X | x | x
---|---|---|---
ASA | X | x | x
Longest delay in queue | x | x | x

\(X = \text{primary measures}; \ x = \text{secondary measures}\)

### Accessibility Measures

#### Blockage

Blockage is an accessibility measure that indicates what percentage of callers will not be able to access the call center at a given time due to an insufficient number of telephone lines. The center may have plenty of telephone lines into the call center so that blockage is not a concern. However, in some cases, the number of incoming telephone lines (also called telephone trunks) is adjusted to achieve a consistent level of access or blockage, such as no more than two percent of callers reaching a busy signal and being forced to retry the call.

**Call Center.** Measures indicating percentage of blockage by time of day or occurrences of “all trunks busy” are utilized by most centers. Failure to include a blockage goal allows a center to always meet its speed of answer goal by simply blocking the excess calls up front. This can have a negative effect on customer accessibility and satisfaction while the call center looks like it is doing a great job.

**Team and Agent.** The individuals in the call center can have an impact on incoming trunk blockage. If understaffing exists due to lack of schedule adherence, then delays in queue will increase, driving up the workload on the incoming trunks, and perhaps causing a higher incidence of blockage experienced by callers. However, blockage is typically not a measure of individual performance.

Engineering the proper number of incoming telephone lines into a call center to ensure a reasonable level of blocked calls is a traffic engineering process that involves calculating telephone trunk workload and using a random traffic arrival pattern algorithm (called an Erlang technique) to determine the optimal number of incoming lines. To learn more about this how-to engineering process, refer to paper *Calculating Call Center Telephone Resources*. (Details in Reference section)

While there is no “industry standard” for telephone or trunk blockage, most call centers today have a goal of blocking no more than 2% of inbound telephone calls. There are some centers that have much higher levels of blockage (such as those with a captive caller audience like a utility or insurance claims where callers have no place else to go and will retry the call), while other centers in a competitive environment (rental car sales, catalogs, etc) may engineer enough incoming lines with much excess capacity so that virtually no caller ever gets a busy signal. Those centers providing critical care services like 911 emergency centers also engineer enough lines to ensure incoming calls do not get blocked with a busy signal on the front end.
**Hours of Access**

Call centers evaluate the hours of current operations to determine if these hours should be extended or shortened. A common measure is the number of calls that arrive outside the normal operating hours of the center.

*Call Center.* Call volumes and percentage of calls arriving outside normal operating hours are measured to evaluate completeness of coverage.

*Team and Agent.* Accessibility is typically not a measure of individual performance.

Information about calls arriving outside normal operating hours may be obtained by simple caller ID information captured at the site, voice mails left after hours, or can be obtained by requesting hourly call reports from the local and long-distance telephone providers.

**Call Abandons**

Call centers measure the number of abandons as well as the percentage of calls that abandon, called the abandon rate or abandonment rate. This abandon rate can translate into lost customers, so it is important to track it to identify patterns of abandon behaviors.

*Call Center.* Abandon rate is a typical measure of call center performance. It should be noted, however, that abandon rate is not entirely under the call center’s control. While abandons are affected by the average wait time in queue (which can be controlled by the call center), there are a multitude of other factors that influence this number, such as caller tolerance, time of day, and availability of service alternatives.

*Team and Agent.* Abandon rate is not a measure of individual performance.

There is no “industry standard” for abandon rate in call centers. Generally call centers with revenue possibilities have a more ambitious goal for capturing and keeping all the calls, while other centers live with abandon rates as high as 10 – 20%. Again, because it is a number affected by so many factors, it is best to focus on other service metrics actually under the center’s control.

**Self-Service Availability**

Many contacts today are being offloaded from call center agents to self-service alternatives such as an upfront telephone menu utilizing Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and/or Web interactions. It is important to measure the percentage of customers that utilize these self-service alternatives, as this contributes directly to both service perception and the bottom line.

*Call Center.* Self-service utilization is an important gauge of accessibility for the call center, and is typically measured as an overall number, by self-service methodology, and by time of day or by demographic group.

*Team and Agent.* Self-service utilization is not a measure of individual performance. For those companies that wish to increase self-service usage, agents may be encouraged to tell customers about these services and encourage their use. In these instances, a performance objective may be the percentage of calls during which
agents tell the customer about these alternatives, or even show how to use them.

**Speed of Service Measures**

One of the top key performance indicators in a call center is the speed of service at which calls are answered. There are several ways to define speed of service in the call center: service level, average speed of answer (ASA), and longest delay in queue.

**Service Level**

Service level is the most common speed of answer measure in the call center. It denotes the percentage of calls that are answered in a defined wait threshold. It is most commonly stated as \( x \) percent of calls handled in \( y \) seconds or less. Service level is generally measured by half-hour, and can be reported as a cumulative simple average over the day, a weighted average over the day based on the actual calls per half-hour, or can be gauged by the percentage of half-hours of the day in which the half-hour service goal is met.

*Call Center.* Service level is one of the most common measures of performance for the overall call center, and is measured by half-hour and typically reported by day.

*Team and Agent.* Service level is an overall call center measure and not an individual one. However, service level is directly impacted by staff being in their seats available when scheduled, so schedule adherence is the measure of individual performance that is typically in place to ensure that the call center’s speed of answer goal is met.

**Average Speed of Answer**

Average speed of answer, or ASA, is the average delay of all calls for the period averaged together. For example, if half the calls go into queue and wait there for an average of sixty seconds, and the other calls go immediately to an agent, the ASA is thirty seconds.

*Call Center.* ASA is a common key performance indicator and is used by many call centers instead of, or in addition to, service level.

*Team and Agent.* ASA is an overall call center measure, not an individual one. However, ASA is directly impacted by staff being in their seats and available to take calls when scheduled, so schedule adherence is the measure of individual performance that is typically in place to ensure that the call center’s ASA goal is met.

It should be noted here that most call centers measure service level and/or ASA as the average number accumulated at the end of each day. While this is the most common way to measure these two speed-of-answer numbers, this end-of-day average is not necessarily the best way to measure and report the numbers.

Calls arriving at a Quitline arrive in peaks and valleys. There will be periods of the day with many calls while at other times the volume drops substantially and there are staffers with idle time on their hands. The ASA goal for this center might be to answer calls in 30 seconds. Given the volatile arrival patterns, there will likely be periods of the day in which the center is understaffed to handle the calls and ASA might be as high as 5 minutes. Conversely, in the non-peak hours, there are plenty of staff to handle the calls.
and most calls are answered immediately with zero wait time. While at the end of the day, the statistics for each of these hours may average together to yield a 30-second ASA result, that number does not really reflect the true service situation encountered by people calling the Quitline.

The analogy is someone with their head in the freezer and feet in an oven. The average body temperature might be normal, but it doesn’t say anything about how uncomfortable the two hot and cold extremes are. The same is true in the call center. Extreme understaffing is a problem with long delays to callers and overworked staff. Overstaffing results in low productivity and paying people needless dollars to be available on the phone when not needed. If the only metric associated with speed of answer if average service level or ASA at the end of the day, then these understaffed and overstaffed situations are masked and it becomes harder to adjust workforce schedules to get the just right number of people on the phones.

Therefore, the recommended metric for service level or ASA is to look at the percentage of the intervals (hourly or half-hourly) for the day in which the service level or ASA goal is met. This metric provides a much more useful look at speed of answer with more information to address staffing issues.

**Longest Delay in Queue**

A real-time measure of performance that is used by many call centers is the age of the call that has been in queue the longest, or the longest delay in queue (LDQ). This is both a historical gauge of performance and a real-time measure.

*Call Center.* Many call centers use real-time LDQ as a measure to indicate when immediate staffing reactions may be required. Historical LDQ indicates the “worst case” experience of a customer over a period of time, such as a day.

*Team and Agent.* The delay situation is a call center measure, not an individual gauge of performance. However, like the other speed of service measures, this statistic is affected by schedule adherence.

**Key Performance Indicators – Quality Measures**

There are many different measures associated with quality in the call center. Some are associated with resolution of the contact, while others are related to the actual process of the call.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Measures</th>
<th>Call Center</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resolution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>First call resolution rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer rate</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
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</table>
Resolution Metrics

There are two main measures associated with the resolution of the call. One is associated with the call being completed to satisfaction within one contact, and the other is related to transfer rate.

First Call Resolution Rate

The percentage of calls completed within a single contact, often called the “one and done” or resolution rate, is a crucial measure of quality within the call center. It gauges the ability of the center, as well as of an individual, to accomplish the call in a single contact without requiring a transfer to another person or area, or without needing another call at a future time to assist the caller.

*Call Center.* The one-call completion rate is tracked and measured by many call centers since it is a crucial factor in many customers’ perception of quality. The satisfactory resolution of a call is tracked overall in the center, as well as by type of call, and perhaps by time of day or by group.

*Team and Agent.* The one-call resolution rate is also an individual gauge of performance, as it measures an individual’s capability to handle the call to completion without requiring assistance via a transferred call or a subsequent call, meaning higher efficiency and better service.

While resolution rate is a critical measure for many call centers, this is a measure that will need to be adapted to be used in a Quitline scenario. Since the goal for the Quitline is to convert eligible callers into counseling, the goal is not to complete that person’s business in one call, but rather to engage the caller and to convert the call into a program sign-up, which may actually result in numerous future calls.

Transfer Rate

The transfer percentage is an indication of what portion of calls has to be transferred to another person to be handled. There are many different reasons why a call is transferred, and tracking these can help fine-tune routing strategies, identify errors in communications of Quitline numbers, as well as identify performance gaps of the staff.

*Call Center.* Tracking transfers and measuring the percentage of transfers and the destination of the calls will indicate problems due to incorrect routing and sorting on the front-end processing of a call. For example, an incorrect number may be published that causes a call to arrive in the wrong place. This call would need to be transferred to another number or party.
**Team and Agent.** Calls are also transferred due to lack of knowledge or lack of skills of the agent. These transfers should be tracked by individual in order to identify performance gaps that need to be addressed.

**Call Handling Process**

There are several measures of performance related to the actual process of handling the call or contact. All of these are important in the customer’s perception of how well the contact is handled from a quality perspective. Some of these measures include telephone etiquette, knowledge and competency, error and rework rate, and adherence to established procedures on the call.

**Telephone Etiquette**

One of critical factors that impacts the caller’s perception of how well the call was handled is simple courtesy and telephone etiquette. The degree to which general telephone communications skills and etiquette are displayed is generally measured via observation or some form of quality monitoring.

**Call Center.** General telephone etiquette is typically not an overall call center measure, but rather, an individual gauge of performance.

**Team and Agent.** Following the call center’s guidelines of telephone etiquette and overall communications, best practices are typically monitored and scored by most call centers on an agent-by-agent, call-by-call basis.

**Knowledge and Competency**

One of the components that lead callers to remark that a call was handled with quality is the ability of the agent to provide correct and thorough product and service information, and to be competent at handling caller questions and problems.

**Call Center.** The measure of knowledge and competency is closely tied to the “one and done” resolution rate mentioned above. However, observation of knowledge and skills is typically measured on an individual basis, not on an overall call center basis.

**Team and Agent.** Call centers typically monitor agents’ calls to determine the extent to which the agents can satisfactorily handle a customer’s request or problem. The level to which an agent can provide product information and solve problems is a critical measure of individual performance related to the quality of the call.

**Error and Rework Rate**

One measure of quality in the call center is the error rate – the degree to which errors have to be corrected or work redone due to poor quality the first time.

**Call Center.** Although not one of the most common measures of quality call processing, many call centers track the errors made on calls and the rework associated with those errors, since it costs the company in terms of productivity and service.

**Team and Agent.** In addition to tracking error and rework rate overall, many call centers also track these elements by individual agent to identify performance issues
and perhaps training and development gaps.

**Adherence to Procedures**

Adherence to procedures such as workflow processes or call scripts is another essential element of quality in the call center. This is particularly important to the perceived quality in terms of the caller receiving a consistent call-handling experience regardless of the contact channel or the individual agent involved in the contact.

*Call Center.* Adherence to processes and procedures is typically measured through simple observation and through the quality monitoring process. Overall adherence is observed, but is typically not a measure of overall call center performance.

*Team and Agent.* Adherence to processes and procedures is a crucial element of individual agent performance in the call center. Adherence to telephone procedures, call scripts, and so on is typically monitored through both general observation and a more formal quality monitoring process.

It should be noted here that another adherence concern for Quitlines is the requirement to adhere to various state protocols for those service providers that serve clients from more than one state.

**Key Performance Indicators – Efficiency Measures**

There are many different metrics used to measure efficiency in the call center. Some are associated with resource efficiency, while others are related to contact handling activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficiency Measures</th>
<th>Call Center</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Agent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Utilization</strong></td>
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<td>Agent occupancy</td>
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<td>Shrinkage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact Handling</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average handle time</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After call work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-hold time</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = primary measures; x = secondary measures

**Measures of Resource Utilization**

**Agent Occupancy**

Agent occupancy is the measure of actual time an agent is busy on a call or doing after-call work compared to available time. It is the percentage of logged-in and available time that an agent is actually busy on a call. It is calculated by dividing workload hours by
Agent occupancy is an important measure of how well the call center has scheduled its staff. If occupancy is too low, agents are sitting around idle with not enough to do. If occupancy is too high, the staff is overworked. Occupancy should be tracked to evaluate how well the call center is using its resources.

Team and Agent. Agent occupancy is an overall call center measure, not an individual gauge of performance. Agents have no control over occupancy, since it is a function of how many calls arrive and how many people are in place to handle the work. Agent occupancy or staff occupancy is one of the most important numbers to measure related to efficient use of personnel resources. One factor that has a major impact on call center staffing and the related staff occupancy is the size of the center or the agent group. Centers handling larger volumes of calls will naturally be more efficient than smaller ones. This is due to the economies of scale of large groups.

As seen in the example below, doubling the call volume does not require two times the number of staff to meet the same service goal of 80% in 20 seconds. As the volume grows, the staff to workload ratio gets smaller or the agent occupancy goes higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calls per Hour</th>
<th>Workload Hours</th>
<th>Staff Required</th>
<th>Staff Occupancy (workload/staff)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>133.33</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for these increased efficiencies and the higher occupancy is simply that with a higher volume of calls, there is a greater likelihood that when an agent is finished with a call, there is another one coming in right behind it for that person to handle. With a bigger volume, each person has the opportunity to process more calls each hour. Each person spends less time in an idle or available state waiting on a call to arrive. In other words, they are busier or more occupied with call workload.

Agent occupancy is the percentage of logged in time that an agent is actually busy in talk or wrap-up time. It is calculated by dividing the amount of workload by the staff hours in place. In the previous table, with 12 staff handling 8.33 hours of workload, agent occupancy is only 69%. At double the call volume with 21 staff in place, twice the workload is being handled without doubling the workforce, so each person is busier. In this case occupancy has increased to 79%.

As the volume of calls grows, increased efficiencies and economies of scale come into effect, meaning occupancy goes higher and higher. And while it is desirable for staff to be productive and busy, asking staff to stay occupied at a 94% rate is not realistic. Most
call centers aim for the 85 – 90% range since occupancy rates higher than that lead to all kinds of undesirable call handling behaviors as well as a high turnover rate.

Keep in mind that size plays a role. Just because it is desirable to be in the 85% range, it does not mean a call center or an agent group can get to that number. Small centers that wish to deliver an 80/20 service level and place sufficient staff in seats may simply not be able to achieve occupancies above 70 or 80 percent. Larger centers have just the opposite problem. Their large group efficiencies may allow them to staff for the same 80/20 service level and have occupancy numbers over 95%. In such cases, these providers have to “pad” in extra workforce until additional staff bring occupancy down to a tolerable level.

**Staff Shrinkage**

Staff shrinkage is defined as the percentage of paid time that agents are not available to the call center to handle calls. It is classified as nonproductive time, and is made up of meeting and training time, breaks, paid time off, off-phone work, and general unexplained time off the phones.

*Call center.* Staff shrinkage is an important number to track, since it plays an important role in how many people will need to be scheduled each half-hour. Most of the shrinkage categories are “fixed,” such as paid vacation time and breaks, as well as training and meeting time. These categories of shrinkage are non-negotiable and out of the control of the center for the most part. Others are more controllable, and should be tracked closely to ensure productivity is maximized.

*Team and Agent.* Shrinkage is an overall gauge of productivity, not one used as an individual measure of performance. Time available to be on the phones is a component of shrinkage, and as such, availability and adherence to schedule are the associated individual performance measures associated with shrinkage.

There is no “industry average” for staff shrinkage. Some centers have staff scheduled off the phones for many different activities including much training or meeting time, or time off the phones to do other kinds of work. Shrinkage percentages may be in the 50% range for centers where agents do a variety of work other than just answer phone calls. On the other hand, in centers where the sole role of the agent is to be present to answer incoming calls, shrinkage may be 20% or less. The key is to track the shrinkage and how much time goes into each category so that it can be effectively factored into the staff scheduling calculation and managed appropriately.

It is important to track actual shrinkage and then incorporate it accurately into the schedule requirement calculations. For example, if staff shrinkage is 25% and 30 staff are needed on the phones to deliver the desired speed of answer, then a calculation of 30/.75 would yield a schedule requirement of 40 people. In other words, 40 people need to be available to be scheduled, so that when the 25% shrinkage is factored in as unavailable phone time, there will be 30 people left to man the phones.

**Schedule Efficiency**

Workforce management is all about getting the “just right” number of people in place each period of the day to handle customer contacts – not too many and not too few.
Schedule efficiency measures the degree of overstaffing and understaffing that exist as a result of scheduling design. It is also referred to as the “net staffing” measure – in other words, how many staff “over” or “under” for each hour or half-hour of the day.

**Call Center.** Call centers gauge schedule efficiency in a number of ways. Net staffing may be measured by hour or half-hour as an indication of how well the resources in the center are being utilized.

**Team and Agent.** Schedule efficiency is not an of individual agent performance measure.

Schedule efficiency is generally viewed as one of the most important measures of productivity or efficiency in a call center. It is the critical measure that indicates whether the most expensive resource in the center – the frontline staff – are being utilized in the best way possible to match workforce to arriving workload.

This measure of schedule efficiency is best achieved by looking at how many intervals of the day the “net staffing” is within a reasonable range. While the ideal is a net staffing of zero (no understaffing or overstaffing), it is nearly impossible to hit that number. Therefore, most centers set an acceptable range of under/over and then measure how many intervals meet the goal. Some centers may have a net staffing goal that is very small (+/- 1 or 2 staff), while larger centers may have a higher net goal (+/- 5 staff). The key here is to measure the number of intervals or percentage of intervals that meet the goal. Much like measuring service level or ASA, it is dangerous to simply do an overall number for the day, where the +s and the –s cancel each other out. For example, an overstaffing of 5 people in one hour does not “balance out” an understaffing of 5 people in another hour. Rather than a “net zero” for those two hours that would be noted by averaging, it should be noted that neither interval met the schedule efficiency goal.

**Schedule Adherence**

Schedule adherence measures the degree to which the specific hours scheduled are actually worked by the agents. There are two forms of adherence – total hours worked and specific hours worked. The first looks at the total hours scheduled for the day and simply compares that number to the total hours worked. (In most call centers, this number is generally referred to as compliance rather than adherence.) True schedule adherence matches the exact hours scheduled versus the exact hours available.

**Call Center.** Schedule adherence is an overall call center measure, both in terms of hours worked as well as specific schedules worked.

**Team and Agent.** Schedule adherence is one of the most important measures of team and individual performance in the call center, as it affects so many other measures. Each agent should be evaluated on total hours worked versus scheduled, as well as adherence to the defined work schedule of start and stop times and scheduled breaks and other activities. This is one of the most important individual performance metrics since it is one of the items over which the agent has control over in the center.
There is no “industry standard” for schedule adherence. Some centers set very lofty goals as high as 98 or 99% adherence for the day, while other centers have adherence goals less than 90%.

For more information about schedule adherence and best practices for setting adherence goals, measuring results, and managing schedule adherence behaviors, refer to paper *Three Steps for Attacking Schedule Adherence Problems*. (See Reference Section.)

**Availability**

Availability is the percent of time that staff are logged in and available to take calls. It is typically viewed as an overall availability, and may or may not be linked to schedule adherence. Availability can be affected by the amount of time that is needed off of the phones to do research, projects, and other activities.

*Call Center.* The call center may measure total hours of availability and may break down availability by team or by individual agent. Another measure of availability is the percentage of time the overall staff were available in contrast to their paid time.

*Team and Agent.* Availability is another important gauge of team and individual performance. It can be measured as hours of time available or by a percentage of time available. However, if the agents are adhering to the scheduled they are given, if available time is low, the problem can only be solved at the team and call center level by changing the scheduled activities.

**Measures of Call Efficiency**

Several performance metrics exist that provide an indication of how efficiently the actual customer contact is being handled. These measures include average handle time, after-call work time, on-hold time, and transfer rate.

**Average Handle Time**

The most common measure of contact handling is the average handle time (AHT). AHT is made up of talk time plus after-call work (ACW), and is a factor used in determining overall workload and staffing requirements.

*Call Center.* Average handle time is one of the most common performance indicators in the call center. To accommodate differences in calling patterns, it should be measured and identified by time of day as well as by day of week.

*Team and Agent.* Average handle time is also a measure associated with team and individual agent performance. While handle times will vary based on call content, the agent should typically deliver a consistent handle time within acceptable boundaries. However, a word of caution is appropriate. Putting too much pressure on shortening AHT can have undesirable effects on quality and sales results.
After-Call Work Time

One of the components of AHT that is considered to be the most variable and the most controllable is the after-call work (ACW) portion of the contact. This is the time spent after the conversation is over, when the agent fills out associated paperwork, updates files, and so on. ACW is work that needs to be done in conjunction with the call before the agent is ready to handle the next contact.

*Call Center.* ACW should be measured and evaluated over time to determine what the appropriate amount of time should be to accomplish the needed tasks. This overall call center ACW number will then typically serve as the benchmark against which to measure an individual agent’s ACW time.

*Team and Agent.* ACW is a component of agent performance that is typically measured with each agent compared to the average ACW time of the team or the center as a whole. It is important to ensure that the comparison is made for similar call types as the requirements can vary significantly among different kinds of call-handling situations.

It is important to measure ACW by type of call as well as by individual. It is also useful to measure ACW by time of day. There can be times of day where understaffing results in high occupancy for staff and therefore very little idle time or “breathing space” between calls. During these periods of the day, it is typical to see a higher ACW time as agents stay in the non-call state to catch their breath between calls. Observing this type of metric will indicate those in need of coaching to prevent this unavailability during already understaffed times.

On-Hold Time

On-hold time is the amount of time a caller is placed on hold during the course of the conversation. Obviously, the goal is to minimize the number of occurrences of placing the caller on hold, as well as to minimize the length of the actual on-hold time.

*Call Center.* Most call centers measure on-hold time, but it is not necessarily one of the top performance indicators. It is more typically used as a gauge for individual agents. However, an overall high percentage of hold time may be an indicator that system performance is slow or that access to multiple systems is delaying the agents in processing the callers’ requests.

*Team and Agent.* On-hold time is a measure of agent performance, as it can serve as an indicator of insufficient product knowledge or other learning or performance gaps. Call centers will want to review the percentage of calls an agent has to put on hold, as well as the length of the hold time.

Key Performance Indicators - Profitability

There are many different financial measures in the call center operation. For Quitlines, these two measures are indicators of success on the incoming side, as well as how efficiently the operation is at providing the needed resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profitability Measures</th>
<th>Call Center</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While profitability measures in a call center generally relate to a traditional “sale” of a product or service, the success rate for a Quitline is measured by a different conversion rate.

**Conversion Rate**

The standard conversion rate in a call center refers to the percentage of calls in which a sales opportunity is translated into an actual sale. It can be measured as an absolute number of sales or as a percentage of calls that result in a sale. In a Quitline operation, this conversion rate refers to the absolute number or percentage of callers that agree to receive cessation counseling (and are immediately transferred to a counselor???).

*Call Center.* Conversion rate is tracked and measured by most call centers as an overall number as well as by type of call or by group.

*Team and Agent.* Conversion rate is also used as an individual measure of performance as an indication of an individual’s ability to effectively convert the initial call into a program sign-up.

**Cost per Call**

A common measure of call center operational efficiency is cost per call or cost per minute to handle the contact workload. This cost per call can be simply a labor cost per call, or it can be a fully loaded rate that includes wage rates in addition to all the telecommunications, facilities, and other services costs.

In setting cost per call, it is critical to define the components being used, and to use them consistently in evaluating how well the call center is making use of financial resources over time. While commonly used to compare one company or site to another in benchmarking, this is not a good practice as the components included may vary and the types of contacts will also often vary.

*Call Center.* Cost per call is one of the key performance indicators of most call center operations. Regardless of whether it is tracked as only a labor cost or as a fully-loaded cost, it is used to evaluate the efficiency of the operation in terms of the use of the company’s financial resources, and it must show a positive return on investment.

*Team and Agent.* While occasionally applied as a team performance measure, cost per call is generally applied only to the call center as a whole. It is not used as an individual measure of performance..
Performance Measures for Frontline Staff

The measurements that apply to an individual agent have been discussed in each of the four previous topics, and are summarized here. A balanced set of measures should include both quantitative metrics, as well as some measures that are qualitative in nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Category</th>
<th>Performance Measures</th>
<th>Quantitative Measure</th>
<th>Qualitative Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Schedule adherence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>First call resolution rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telephone etiquette</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competency/knowledge</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Error/rework rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adherence to procedures</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Schedule adherence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AHT</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACW</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-hold time</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profitability</td>
<td>Conversion rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common quantitative measures of performance are attendance and schedule adherence, availability, AHT, ACW, on-hold and transfer rates, and conversion rate.

Individual agents will also be evaluated on qualitative gauges. These measures do not lend themselves as easily to being defined and scored. They include general telephone etiquette and communications skills, product and service knowledge, completeness of the call handling, and adherence to defined procedures and processes.

These qualitative measures of what an agent says or how the agent interacts with the customer are typically observed and evaluated by using a quality monitoring process. Some call centers want to know if the agent said the organization’s name in the greeting; used the caller’s name appropriately; utilized the correct tone, pitch, and volume; and closed the call appropriately. Each of these items can be observed by using a manual or automated process with a quality monitoring form. Monitoring can include side-by-side monitoring, silent monitoring, and recorded monitoring.

Section 3: The Performance Management Process
Performance management begins with defining performance goals and expectations. There are many quantitative performance expectations (defined in the previous section) such as schedule adherence percentage, average handle time, call transfer rate, conversion rate, and so on. Others expectations will be defined around qualitative goals such as portrayal of positive image, display of active listening skills, or use of proper pacing and voice quality. Many of these need to be defined down to a behavioral level in order for employees to fully understand what is expected, and in order to measure their performance fairly and objectively.

Once these goals and expectations have been set, the next step is to gather information about actual performance versus desired performance to identify performance gaps and problems. There are many sources of quantitative information from which to draw, while qualitative information will likely come from observation and monitoring to ensure adherence to the proper behaviors and actions.

This section will discuss the overall performance management process and focus on how performance expectations are defined and how actual performance is measured at an individual level, with attention given to the various aspects of the quality monitoring process.

**Steps of Performance Management**

By definition, performance management is the application of scientific behavior analysis to the workplace. It is not a one-time management solution to a single problem with one employee. Done correctly, performance management provides a precise way of defining the work to be done, analyzing results, and implementing solutions that will not only deal with inadequate performance, but will provide practical ways to maximize performance of every individual on the team.

The best way to explain how the performance management process works is to use a metaphor to present the concept. The metaphor for this concept is a visit to the doctor and an attempt to diagnose a medical problem. There are many similarities between the performance management process and the medical diagnostic process, including:

- Symptoms alert someone to the possibility of a problem.
- A process is used to analyze symptoms and determine cause of the problem.
- The diagnostic procedure begins with small tests and builds to more complex (and expensive) ones depending upon severity of the problem.
- A plan or method of treatment is established.
- Intervention is planned and executed once the cause is determined.
- Progress is monitored and corrections or adjustments in treatment are made when necessary.
Step 1: Defining Healthy Performance

The first step in the diagnostic procedure is to define what is “healthy.” The “norms” are determined by scientific research and in the medical world might include normal ranges for body temperature, blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol levels, and so on. Individual doctors have the same basic definitions about what constitutes “good health” versus a medical variation or abnormality.

The link to the call center is similar. Within the call center, “healthy” is determined by management strategy and goals and not opinions of individual supervisors or team leaders. The management team has likely determined performance standards and these should be translated into workable behavioral standards for the frontline staff.

Knowing what the “healthy” or ideal performance looks like enables a manager to identify when an agent’s performance is “unhealthy” and in need of some type of intervention to facilitate improvement. Defining these specific standards and behaviors will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

Step 2: Measuring Current Performance

Doctors don’t treat symptoms without diagnosing their cause. They know the presenting problem is not always the cause of the ailment. Doctors first analyze the symptoms and conduct tests to make sure of an accurate diagnosis or to establish a baseline. And in some cases, symptoms may not be present. For example, before beginning a new exercise program, a patient would want to check with the doctor to determine the “health” of his heart. In other words, not all diagnoses are driven by presenting problems; some are precautionary and preventative.

In the call center, managers should analyze performance information to see if symptoms of performance problems exist. In some cases, performance will be reviewed based on a certain incident or a concern, but in other situations the “check-up” is merely a routine one that assesses performance on a regularly scheduled basis.

The process of comparing what is “healthy” or “what you want” versus “what you have” is sometimes referred to as a performance gap analysis. Performance will either be in the acceptable range, or out of range either as exceptional or below expectations. Performance below expectations is then evaluated and analyzed to determine a root cause for the problem.

Step 3: Diagnosing the Problem

Doctors use a systematic diagnostic process to correctly determine the cause of symptoms or to assess general health. When a presenting problem arises, there is a diagnostic system in place that employs various types of tests (examination, blood tests, x-rays, etc.) to obtain information needed to correctly identify the cause of the problem. The severity of the symptoms will dictate the complexity of the test administered.

The link to the call center is similar. Instead of relying on a “gut” feeling, a systematic process to guide diagnosis and decision-making should be used. Some presenting problems are simple and don’t require sophisticated analysis to identify or correct. Others are more complicated. Having a performance management model allows managers to get to the real root cause of a problem.
Step 4: Applying a Treatment
Doctors plan interventions once the cause has been determined. Once the cause has been established, they can plan a specific intervention, requiring the least invasive process necessary to deal with the problem. A doctor’s credibility would surely be affected should the patient learn the doctor performed unnecessary surgery or prescribed incorrect medication, not to mention the risk to the patient’s health.

In applying a treatment to a call center performance problem, managers will want to recommend the least invasive intervention to improve performance. This intervention must focus on the root cause. Focusing on the root cause helps establish the most effective long-term solution rather than a “quick fix” remedy.

Step 5: Monitoring Behaviors
When medical treatment is prescribed, a process for monitoring the patient’s progress is established to make sure the treatment is effective and there are no side effects. The more complicated the situation and intervention, the more formal or elaborate the monitoring process is. Monitoring could be as simple as “take two aspirins and call me if the pain continues”, or as complex as a hospital stay and observation after major surgery. In either case, the process serves the same purpose – to ensure the intervention has been effective.

In some cases the intervention may not be effective. The doctor may change a medication if desired results are not achieved with the first one. Anytime a treatment is not effective, the doctor goes back to the drawing board and tries another method.

Managers should follow the same process. When an intervention is planned, monitoring should be included as part of the follow-up to assess the effectiveness of the action. In some cases, the prescribed treatment doesn’t work, and the manager will need to work closely with the agent to try another solution until the desired performance is achieved.

Step 6: Practicing Preventative Maintenance
Preventative maintenance plays a major role in today’s emphasis on managed care. With the shift to managed care programs, medical personnel have discovered it is more cost effective to intervene in the health process before negative symptoms are presented. The emphasis is shifting from treatment to prevention, which includes proactive measures to change unhealthy behaviors and habits before they can create bigger medical problems.

The link to the call center is similar. It is always better to correct simple performance situations before they manifest into complex problems. By using processes to continuously monitor and diagnose performance issues, managers can prevent simple errors or misunderstanding from becoming widespread problems.

Defining Performance Standards
The first step of performance management is defining performance standards and expectations. However, this is not typically a job undertaken by a single individual. These performance standards will need to be consistent across the centers and probably not unique to any site or team.
It is dangerous to define expectations and performance goals based on an individual management style. It would be difficult for your call center or your company to survive if all the managers and supervisors had their own individual styles of management and performance expectations. The overall performance management process and defined standards in place must support the organization’s mission and goals.

As Aubrey Daniels points out in the book *Bringing Out the Best in People*, imagine a doctor saying, “I’ve developed my own operational style. I’m going to operate on your brain a little differently than other surgeons would. I’ve had a few real successes with this technique, so don’t worry.” Or suppose you’re on a plane and pilot announces that he’s going to land a little differently than FAA procedures require based on his flying preferences. Performing surgery or flying a plane requires precision and the use of established processes. Managing people’s behaviors is just as important to a business and therefore should not be made up of a wide collection of subjective approaches based on each manager’s or supervisor’s own personal style.

Performance standards should be defined that explain what is expected of every person in the call center. Agents on one team that take the same kinds of calls as another team should have their performance judged in the same way, even though they work for two different supervisors. The standards should define what is expected in terms of desired behaviors and each supervisor should measure actual performance against those same standards. Every supervisor should follow the same steps of diagnosis and treatment. Employees must see in practice, not just in theory, that the same performance is expected of everyone. They should know that their performance will be evaluated in the same way, and that rewards and consequences will be applied consistently.

The performance management process involves establishing clear expectations about the essential job functions the employee is expected to perform and then breaking down those job functions into clearly defined behavioral expectations and standards.

**Quantitative Standards**

The easiest expectations to define are the quantitative standards of performance for the organization. It is fairly easy to define a range of numbers into which a person should fall within various categories. A list of quantitative measures and a sample range for each is listed in the table below. (*Note: The numbers listed in the table are not meant to indicate “industry averages” or suggested standards. They only indicate a sample.*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Category</th>
<th>Quantitative Performance Measures</th>
<th>Sample Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Schedule adherence</td>
<td>&gt;97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>First call resolution rate</td>
<td>&gt;90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transfer rate</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Error/rework rate</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>&gt;80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AHT</td>
<td>220 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACW On-hold time</td>
<td>25 sec &lt; 30sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profitability</td>
<td>Conversion rate</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categories listed in the table represent the common categories of performance upon which an agent might be measured. These expectations of performance should be defined for each unique position in the center, with careful thought given to what an unacceptable number would be, what constitutes satisfactory performance, and what level of performance would be considered exceptional performance.

Different numbers may be appropriate based on the type(s) of calls the team receives or the length of time on the job. For example, you may have an expectation of an average handle time of 220 seconds, but that expectation may be defined a little higher for brand new employees still in a learning mode. They should be aware that they will be expected to reach this number at a certain point in time, but their performance expectation as a trainee may be legitimately lower.

Most call center measures tend to focus on quantitative performance measures, not because they’re more important, but simply because they’re easy to obtain. It is also more of a black and white definition of whether an employee met an expectation or not. However, much of what defines success in the mind of the caller has to do with how well the call was handled, and that expectation points to qualitative measures of performance.

**Qualitative Standards**

It is a much more difficult task to define qualitative standards of performance since definitions of quality tend to be more subjective in nature. For example, everyone would agree that agents should exhibit good telephone etiquette on a call, but two different people may have two different definitions about what constitutes good telephone manners.

Below are a few samples of competencies associated with providing quality service over the telephone:

- Adapt the call to the customer’s tone and pace.
- Project a positive and professional corporate image.
- Demonstrate a supportive approach when dealing with callers.
- Maintain control of the conversation to balance service with efficiency.

Everyone would agree that these are certainly reasonable and desirable expectations. However, each of the above expectations needs to be defined in more detail in order to be a clear performance standard.

For example, there is a need to define in more specific terms what is meant by “adapting the call to the customer’s tone and pace.” A full definition of that expectation should be provided, along with sample behaviors of what to do and what not to do, as illustrated below:
Goal: Adapt call to the customer’s tone and pace

Definition:
Adjust to the mood and pace of the caller.
Refrain from imposing your own style or rate of speech on the customer.
Relate to callers as individuals and adapt presentation style and content to fit their needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behaviors</th>
<th>Negative Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slow pace down for inexperienced caller.</td>
<td>Raise your voice to a caller who is yelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt to slower pace for different language or accent.</td>
<td>Offer detailed, complicated explanations when caller has indicated he is in a hurry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another example might be the expectation of displaying a positive, professional corporate image. That phrase alone leaves much room for interpretation about what is meant by “professional” or what contributes to corporate image. Defining this expectation with a full definition and examples of positive and negative behaviors will make the expectation clearer, and therefore more likely to happen.

Goal: Project a positive, professional corporate image

Definition:
Speak clearly and keep conversation focused on caller needs.
Use the agency name in the greeting and/or closing.
Avoid slang and technical terms unfamiliar to the caller.
Use “we” instead of “they” to project cohesive unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behaviors</th>
<th>Negative Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer assistance – “I’ll be happy to help you with that question.”</td>
<td>Use can’t, don’t, or won’t – “I can’t find that in your record.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer positive statements about company – “Our success rate is excellent with this program.”</td>
<td>Disclose undesirable things about company - “Delays have been really long all day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use “we” when referring to company – “We have a wide ranges of services to offer.”</td>
<td>Use “they” when referring to company - “They don’t give out that number to callers.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Defining the standards down to this behavioral level will accomplish two things. First, it will make it much clearer to your employees what to do and what not to do on a call. One of the reasons that employees don’t live up to performance expectations is that sometimes they really don’t understand what the expectations are. Too much is left up to the employee to figure out what would be appropriate or not. The more ambiguity the center can remove, the clearer they will be on what to do, and be more likely to meet the performance expectation. Be as precise as possible with the definitions and give both
positive and negative examples.

The other benefit of having performance standards defined all the way down to the behavioral level is that it will make performance evaluation much easier for managers and quality analysts. Scoring a call becomes a matter of checking yes or no for the display of the behaviors you want to see, with little room for interpretation about whether an employee met the expectation or not. It is a much easier process for you and a much fairer process for the employees.

Defining performance expectations to this level takes time, but it is well worth the effort. It helps the each employee better understand what to do, and ensures fairness and consistency in the evaluation process. Having these definitions in place reduces the possibility that you can judge two employees differently based on personal feelings about those individuals. The evaluation process becomes a matter of judging a set of behaviors and not an individual.

Section 4: Measuring Call Performance/Quality Monitoring

Measuring how well frontline staff are meeting qualitative standards is typically done through quality monitoring of calls. This monitoring may be done with simple one-to-one observation or by using sophisticated remote monitoring of both telephone calls and screen activities.

Side-by-side monitoring involves simply sitting next to the employee and listening to how the call is handled. The best procedure to accomplish this task, with minimal disruption to other agents, is to “double-jack” into the agent’s telephone set. A double-jack refers to the agent’s telephone set having dual headset connections that enables the agent and observer to connect directly into the same telephone set using two separate headsets. The observer’s headset will be placed in a “mute” position to enable hearing but no sound.

The advantage to this approach is being there at the agent’s side to provide “on the spot” coaching and guidance. The biggest disadvantage of using side-by-side monitoring is the potential for the agent to be more nervous since they will be observed in very close proximity. Some agents are more comfortable without someone “watching over their shoulder”, so the side-by-side monitoring procedure should be combined with one or more different monitoring procedures.

Silent monitoring allows one to access a call currently in progress, listening to both sides of the conversation between the caller and agent without either of them knowing that someone is observing. There are two major drawbacks to silent monitoring. One is the requirement to do it when calls are happening in real-time. It may be difficult to fit monitoring into a busy daily schedule, so it is common for goals to accomplish a set number of observations to be missed.

In addition, it can be difficult to catch calls from the beginning without listening to a partial call and then waiting for the next one to begin, wasting time and effort. Another drawback is that there is no record of the call except in the observer’s mind and written notes. When the review with the agent happens, it is easy for the agent to deny having
said something, or just not to understand what was meant by an “unenthusiastic manner” for example. This lack of record can be particularly problematic in a situation where the agent is being considered for a disciplinary measure.

A final category of monitoring involves remote monitoring and recording of the calls. This monitoring and recording function is typically accomplished through the use of a quality monitoring system. While some organizations record every call for business purposes, most do not. The quality monitoring system is usually programmed to record randomly, sampling each agent at different times of day and week to ensure a fair sampling. Generally, the programming calls for a specific number of calls or number of minutes to be recorded per agent.

Optionally, the system may also record the data screens and entries the agent performs during the calls so the review can include exactly what the agents saw on the screen and what keystrokes they entered as they processed the call. This information will be displayed on screen as the call is reviewed to help determine if the agent is navigating through the system in the most efficient way, making appropriate notes in the customer files, and accessing the right information to solve the customer’s problem.

The call recordings generated by the system can be stored for future use, or deleted immediately upon review. The random selection process supports a fair and unbiased review process, which can be important when disciplinary issues are involved or should accusations of bias ever be leveled against call center management. If the system instructions are to gather the same number of calls or minutes for each person during sometime in the shift, there can be little risk of the process being found to unfairly target one individual or group of agents.

It is possible in most of these systems to selectively record a specific agent or calls to a particular group, but this is more the exception than the rule in actual practice in most centers. Some centers choose to record all calls handled by trainees, for example, or those that come from a high-value customer group. However, in most cases the calls are recorded randomly.

Another real benefit of having a call recording system in place is the ability to review calls along with the employee. Many call centers have a practice where the supervisor and agent listen to a call together and score it independently. This allows the agents to observe their own calls for self-feedback purposes in addition to the feedback that the supervisor provides. With this tool in hand, the possibility for denying certain behaviors is eliminated since the evidence is right in front of the agent.

Another capability of quality monitoring systems is the ability for an agent to actively select to record a call in progress. This feature was originally intended to allow the recording of abusive or threatening calls, but it is being used in many centers as a voluntary self-assessment tool for those agents that want to gauge how they’re doing. One call center uses this feature to have a “Worst Call of the Week” contest in which agents can record a particularly difficult call to demonstrate how they’ve used proper call-handling techniques to handle it.

**Call Monitoring Policy**

Every call center that monitors calls should have a formal quality monitoring policy in
place. Much of the policy will outline the process by which employees will be notified of the call monitoring guidelines, both during the hiring process, as well as on an ongoing basis. The policy will also describe the tools and instruments to be used and how scores of calls will be communicated to the staff.

**Quality Monitoring Forms**

Every call center has its own version of monitoring form. Much thought should go into creating a quality monitoring form to ensure it is relevant to the business, user-friendly, fair and objective, and most importantly, useful as a coaching tool.

Many call centers simply borrow forms from other centers, or use a form that was created back when the business was very different. The form should be carefully constructed and updated as needed to reflect the changing needs of the business.

The quality form should be reviewed regularly and the first step will be assembling a review team. A sample of frontline agents, supervisors, and quality assurance specialists should participate in the review. The ideal size is probably eight to ten people with someone assigned to be the facilitator.

As you begin the review, keep in mind the call center’s main performance objectives (which have been set to match corporate objectives). Note which goals are most important and then which call center goals support that. Your main purpose for monitoring calls should be to ensure that those call center objectives are being attained on each call. Samples of corporate goals might be:

- Create unified customer experience.
- Improve/maintain accuracy and efficiency.

In terms of designing the overall form, organize the sections according to the order and flow of the call for ease of use and speed of completion. Common sections that follow a logical order, along with associated behaviors are listed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>Discovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses standard greeting</td>
<td>Clarifies purpose of call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verifies customer account</td>
<td>Asks fact-finding questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates customer information</td>
<td>Identifies correct nature of call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers assistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Closing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matches best option to need</td>
<td>Summarizes actions taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains delivery schedule</td>
<td>Offers additional assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows resolution procedure</td>
<td>Thanks customer for business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes additional services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Standards Document

Every call center should have a quality standards document that is a comprehensive reference for all the components of the quality form. All the definitions of objectives will be noted here, along with samples of positive and negative behaviors that someone should watch for in the call monitoring process. This document should be updated regularly to add new examples and remove outdated ones.

Both supervisors and agents should be involved in updating this document. It is useful to review small pieces of it on a regular basis, to remind agents what the definitions are of desirable and undesirable performance, as well as to refresh and update the document as examples and types of calls change.

Include for each behavior the specific steps for performing the behavior. Include notes about when it should be performed during the call. It is also useful to include what call center goal or corporate goal the behavior supports to demonstrate its relevance.

Call Calibration

An important step in the quality monitoring process is the regular calibration of calls. Call calibration is the process of standardizing the call evaluation and scoring process. The ultimate goal of the process is to make sure that when any two people listen to and evaluate a call, they arrive at exactly the same score. The process ensures fairness and objectivity in the evaluation and scoring process and is an absolute requirement for improvement through the call monitoring process.

There are benefits of call calibration for everyone in the call center, as outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent Perspective</th>
<th>Supervisor Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotes consistency</td>
<td>Defines call standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures same scoring, regardless of who monitors or scores</td>
<td>Clarifies procedures and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifts focus away from fairness and towards achievements and areas of improvement</td>
<td>Expands skill and/or knowledge base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Perspective</th>
<th>Customer Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides consistent service to customers</td>
<td>Improves service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains integrity of quality program (fewer agent complaints)</td>
<td>Promotes more reliable service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports center performance standards</td>
<td>Promotes more consistent service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are three items needed for a call calibration session – the quality standard document with all the definitions of objectives and desired behaviors, the quality monitoring form, and some sample calls. It also requires participation by individuals that have been trained in the call monitoring process and are familiar with definitions in the quality standards document.

The following outlines the steps in the call calibration process:

1. Gather a representative group. This group should typically include supervisors, frontline agents, and quality assurance staff. Depending upon the type of call being reviewed, it may be wise to include folks from other areas of the companies whose interests are represented in the center. The optimal size of the group is eight to ten people. If more than twelve people are going to participate, you should probably split into two teams.

2. Randomly select a sample of calls. Sample calls from various agents at various times of day. Ask for volunteers to be monitored so that nobody feels like they’re being “picked on” during the review process.

3. Listen and score the calls. Everyone should listen to the calls with a complete “poker face.” There should be no visual reaction from anyone, including laughing, rolling of eyes, etc. that might influence other people’s reaction to the call. Verbal comments should not be allowed at this point either. Remember that the goal is a completely unbiased score from each person with no influence from others in the scoring process.

4. Treat each call independently. Even if the reviewer knows the person who took the sample call, try not to think about what the agent “usually does” on a call, or the fact that the call may not be a typical one from a customer perspective. Don’t let that person’s status in the call center or overall performance influence the score for that particular call.

5. Start calibration with a definition of excellence. Discuss several calls without using the monitoring form. Rather, discuss what was “excellent” about each call and perhaps add those items to the definitions in the quality standards document. If the calls had some problems, discuss what an “expert agent” might have done differently on the call. Note any negative behaviors exhibited and add those to your “not to do” list in the quality document.

6. Once definitions are set and everyone is clear on the attributes of an excellent call, score the next call using the monitoring form. Ensure that the definitions created in the step above are represented on the form.

7. List each judge’s score on the board without any rationale of how the scores were determined.

8. Select the person who rated the call the lowest to explain the rationale. Determine what proficiencies need coaching and seek agreement from group. The majority of the group should agree that coaching opportunities are valid.

9. Have someone take notes regarding recommendations or changes in proficiency definitions.

10. Ensure that all the changes agreed to in the session are incorporated into the quality standards document and are added to the monitoring form.
Call Scoring and Evaluation

There are many different ways to evaluate and score various components of a call. Some call centers prefer the “Yes/No” or “Pass/Fail” checklist, where the form indicates whether the agent displayed the desired behavior or not. Assuming that the behaviors are adequately defined, this is a completely objective scoring process.

This “Yes/No” scoring is illustrated in the scorecard below. This first example shows just the Customer Service skills from a more comprehensive quality monitoring form that also includes sections for Sales, Technical, and Specialized skills. In this scorecard, an agent’s performance was observed over four calls. For some of the traits, the agent had the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of that skill or procedure on every call (such as prompt answer, positive corporate image, attentive listening, and using the customer name). On some calls, the agent did not have the opportunity to demonstrate a skill. For example, only two of the four calls required the caller to be put on hold during the call, and only one call provided the opportunity to demonstrate use of problem-solving steps and techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer Service Skills</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivered prompt answer and salutation</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used agency name in greeting and closing</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>1111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used attentive listening skills and responses</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted call to customer tone and pace</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrated proper hold technique</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used caller name during call</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used problem-solving steps to diagnose problem</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displayed empathy and support</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained control of conversation</td>
<td>1111</td>
<td>1111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this “Yes/No” scorecard, the agent had the opportunity to demonstrate proper behaviors 29 times, as shown by the marks in the Opportunity column. The marks in the Compliance column show the number of times the agent displayed the proper behaviors or processes. In this example, the agent did the right thing 21 times. Therefore, the agent’s score would be 21 out of 29, or a 72% score.

In this scoring process, there is no judgment about how well the agent displayed any of the skills. In this type of scoring, the agent is credited with a score as long as the behavior was displayed according to the definition of the proper behavior in the quality standards document.

In addition to this type of “Yes/No” monitoring form and scorecard, other forms can be developed that allow calls to be scored in a variety of categories, with a rating scale for each element (i.e., 5 for excellent, 4 for good, 3 for fair, 2 for poor, and 1 for unacceptable performance). This type of scoring has the advantage of showing a range of
performance on each behavior or skill, so agents can better see their strengths and weaknesses. However, it also adds some subjectivity to the scoring process, unless each rating has a specific definition and example showing what would earn a 5 score versus 2 score for each skill. There is more work involved in this approach, but it is worthwhile in terms of communicating more specifics about agent performance.

Section 5: Performance Reporting

Once performance goals have been set and a system of measures developed, the final step in the performance measurement process is to develop a reporting mechanism. Reports inform management and employees about performance and will help identify areas for improvement or corrective action. When developing a reporting strategy, it is critical to provide information upon which decisions can be made or behaviors changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Agents Should See</th>
<th>What Management Should See</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Average handle time</td>
<td>1. Resource utilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Schedule adherence</td>
<td>2. Service level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transfer percentage</td>
<td>3. Cost per call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Quality scores</td>
<td>4. Revenue per call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customer satisfaction scores</td>
<td>5. Customer satisfaction scores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An effective reporting strategy will provide a complete review of the current state of performance in the call center and should provide the means to identify gaps in performance, evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and suggest steps to improve call center operations. The reporting strategy should include what information will be presented, the frequency, the format, and the reporting medium. For example, agents may need to see their performance statistics daily and those might be provided via the company’s intranet or an email. Other statistics such as service level may need to be communicated on a real-time basis to the center as a whole and readerboards might be used. Revenue reports might go to senior management monthly and be delivered via a paper report.

Reporting Methodologies

The call center is by its nature a hub of communications. Customer calls, e-mails, web chats, faxes, and correspondence are handled there. Even an internal support call center handles interactions with its internal customers in a variety of media. So it is natural that the call center will need to communicate with all of the enterprise stakeholders. Agents need feedback to understand how well their performance is meeting expectations and understand changes that need to be made. Senior managers need to know how well the call center is utilizing the company’s resources and how well customer needs are being met.

Developing a communications plan involves building a framework that defines the
purpose of each report, the recipients, the sources of data and the metric that is to be used. Different channels of communication must also be considered to ensure that the information arrives in an efficient and effective manner. Each group of recipients needs a specific level of detail on the measures that apply to them, with the detail or summary level that makes the data useful for decision-making. There are a variety of charts and graphs that can be used for analysis of the data as well, and choosing the right format will help to make the data as relevant and useful as possible. Whether the goal is to inform agents of their performance so that a continuous improvement plan can be realized, or updates to senior management with summary trend analysis, having a clear plan for the reporting and communication effort will maximize the value of the data in managing the enterprise and minimize redundant or irrelevant reports circulating through the company.

To be effective, the reporting provided by the call center must be relevant, accurate, and timely. If the information is meant to result in a change, it needs to reach the appropriate people in time for that change to be accomplished. For example, if an agent is having a difficult time with a specific call, the supervisor must receive the information quickly if she is to assist that agent in completing the call quickly and successfully. In the case of data provided on customer product needs or complaints, the information needs to reach the product development team while there is still time to modify the next release of the product.

Trend and summary data such as reports on Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for senior management are likely to be produced less frequently than the more detailed data that is shared among the call center management team on a daily basis. The call center managers are likely to react to information that indicates a problem quickly, while senior management is less likely to press for instant changes based on report data they receive.

The level of detail in the reports must also be appropriate for the audience. The agent needs to see details on his performance, perhaps even on a single call. But this level of information would be overwhelming for a call center manager with 100 agents. So at each succeeding level of the hierarchy, the level of detail generally diminishes to be replaced by summary statistics and trend analysis. If these summaries spark interest in more information, the details can always be requested and provided for further study.

**Real-Time Reporting**

The primary reason to have access to real-time data is to be able to affect a needed change as quickly as possible. One such change that consumes a great deal of energy in nearly every call center is ensuring that the number of agents available to handle the workload is matched to the actual workload as it arrives. The real-time displays that are provided with the automatic call distributor (ACD) provide the supervisors and others in the call center with information that can be refreshed as frequently as every few seconds. This data will inform the staff if there are calls in queue, how long they have waited, whether there are agents available, and what work state each agent is in at that moment. Should the delay be longer than the center's goal, the supervisors can identify agents who need to be encouraged to pick up calls, or even log in themselves to handle a few calls to reduce the wait time for customers.

Many call centers use wall-mounted displays or alert boxes on the agent's screen to
provide access to these real-time statistics. This allows everyone in the center to see the status of the queues and other important information. This empowers agents to take responsibility for logging in to handle calls when the queue backs up, and allows supervisors to keep an eye on the situation even when away from their desks and real-time monitoring terminals. These displays can also provide real-time information in a text message that is needed to handle the calls appropriately. For example, a cellular service provider may have a technical problem in one area and may expect calls from customers regarding dropped calls or other failures. Sending a message to all agents in the center quickly so that these calls can be handled knowledgeably and quickly can be done via a text message on the wall display or on the text message area of the agents’ desktop.

**Communicating Performance Results**

Development of a performance communication plan requires two primary components — a framework for the communication plan and a clear understanding of the purposes that the reports are meant to serve. The reporting strategy should align each of the report elements and measurements to the enterprise goals and ultimately to the mission and vision statements. The enterprise goals are communicated from the top of the organization with breakdowns into the appropriate requirements for each business unit, department, team and individual. These goals at the call center level, team level, and individual level should be clearly reflected in the key performance indicators (KPIs) of the call center.

Looking at the performance reports, the analysis typically starts at the smallest unit and rolls up to the top of the organization. Individual performance reports roll up into team goals. Team results roll up into department results for the call center, which combine with other departments to make up business unit results such as those for the Customer Care unit or a regional unit of a multi-site operation. Ultimately, the business unit goals and results roll up to the total organization. Therefore, the alignment of the call center’s measurements and reports must align with the goals as they roll up through the organization. This alignment is depicted below.
Developing a Framework

Reporting and communication should not “just happen” but follow a plan that addresses what needs to be communicated, to whom, when, and at what level of detail. Each enterprise goal that the call center can contribute to should have some reporting elements that identify how well that goal is being met. Developing a reporting framework is a useful process that organizes the effort and identifies each of the elements that must be addressed in the reports. In the example below, a model for a reporting framework is provided to serve as a basic outline to develop the reporting and communications plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Title</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Info Reported</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Recipients</th>
<th>Distribution Frequency</th>
<th>Channel Used</th>
<th>Report Owner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the columns is intended to assist the call center manager in developing the plan for the reports and communication processes that need to be accomplished. The explanation of the columns below includes an example using a goal for speed of answer measurement as an element of ensuring accessibility to customers.

- **Report Title** – This is the name that will be given to the report so that it can be easily identified. There may be a series of reports that are grouped together to convey various elements of the same performance metric as well. An example might be “Weekly Speed of Answer Report” which could be part of a series of reports that include Daily, Weekly, Monthly Trend Analysis, and even half-hourly reports that will be needed for the different levels of the organization.

- **Purpose** – The reason that the report is provided is the purpose and this ties back to the enterprise goal. For example, the speed-of-answer reports are provided to measure the call center’s performance against the goal of providing accessibility for customers or being “easy to reach”. Other accessibility reports might include analysis of call attempts turned away after-hours, busy signals, and Website availability percentages.

- **Info Reported** - This column is used to provide the specific data fields that will be included in the report, the calculation where appropriate, and the goals that are being measured. In the case of the speed-of-answer goal, the report might indicate that 70% of calls are being handled within 20 seconds in 75% of the half-hours of the day. The report might illustrate how the data is calculated based on the percent of calls that are answered within 20 seconds.

- **Source** – This column provides the source of the data that will support the calculations and data elements. The source will identify the system reports or...
other places that the raw data will be found that support the calculations that are in the report, such as the ACD Daily Service Level Report. Some reports will require multiple data sources.

- **Recipients** – This column identifies who will receive the report and may include titles and/or specific names. It is easier to use the plan document when names are used as well as titles, but it will require more upkeep to keep the plan current as personnel change roles in the company. The speed-of-answer report will be broken down into several levels of data and each will be provided to a different group of recipients. For example, the call center supervisors will need the half-hourly report while the senior management will probably prefer the Monthly Trend Analysis.

- **Distribution Frequency** – This column defines how often the report will be generated and distributed to the defined recipients. In some cases, there will need to be intermediate data provided to roll up into the specific report and that should be clearly defined with a timeframe for when the components are due in the hands of the final report developer to ensure that the composite report is completed on time.

- **Channel Used** – This column defines the way the reports will be distributed. Some may be made available on a company intranet and not actually distributed, but simply posted for the recipients to access as desired, while others will be printed and presented or provided via an e-mail attachment. The reports on speed of answer that are distributed within the call center are likely to be posted on the wall for all to see, while the monthly reports are more likely to be e-mailed or printed and distributed since some of them will go to personnel who are not in the call center every day.

- **Report Owner** – This column defines who in the organization has responsibility for development and distribution of each report. The speed-of-answer report is likely to be the responsibility of the workforce management team within the call center, but a specific individual should be identified for each one to avoid confusion and missed reports. Once again, job titles and names would be helpful so that when a person changes roles, someone can easily identify the tasks that need to be picked up or turned over to the successor.

It is common in existing call centers to find that there are reports produced that are not used by some or all of the recipients. A report may have been developed to meet a demand from a former manager or to track a situation that was resolved months ago. Therefore, it is a good practice to review the reporting and communication plan at least annually and determine if each report is still relevant and useful to all of the recipients. Cutting down the distribution list may be appropriate for some if the report cannot be totally eliminated. Perhaps the data provided is not at the right level of detail for the current environment. A new report may be needed based on a new technology implementation or a change in process or products/services provided. The annual review will help to ensure that the reports serve a defined purpose and are worth the time needed to produce them.
Communications Channels

Part of the communications plan includes determining the best channel to be used for the report or communications. Some information is best delivered in writing and other communications are better provided verbally and in person. There are many options to consider:

- **Face-to-face** – A human-to-human interaction done face-to-face is typically vocal but may be accompanied by a paper-based document as well to reinforce and memorialize the verbal statements. Face-to-face communication is typically the best choice when delivering bad news or counseling an agent on poor performance, but may also be the ideal choice for delivering praise and recognition. However, most vocal communication on individual performance should also be documented in a paper-based medium.

- **Paper-based** – This includes any printed or hand-written report including a pre-printed form, graphics, tabular numbers, printouts from systems, and/or text. The document can be any length from a partial page to many pages. This is the best medium to use when communicating a large amount of detail, a complex concept, an ongoing analysis that will be amended on a regular basis, or any analysis that requires charts and graphs to be effective. It is also appropriate when a conversation needs to be documented for future reference.

- **Telephone** - Another simple form of communications is via telephone. A telephone call may be placed to inform another party of a performance result, and this telephone communications may be accompanied by a paper-based document or email.

- **E-mail** - E-mail is more and more common and often used inappropriately when face-to-face communications is really required. However, e-mail is a good choice for routine updates and unemotional information. Call centers use e-mail to communicate minor changes in product or pricing or the marketing focus of the day, for example. It is best for small amounts of detail at one time rather than large documents.

- **Internet or Intranet** - The Web must also be considered an electronic communications channel that can be an effective or destructive mechanism for disseminating both information and misinformation. This includes both the company’s intranet and the external Internet. In multi-site call centers, an intranet site is often used as a central repository for performance data and information that needs to be accessed by personnel at all sites.

- **Real-Time Display** - Another electronic form of communication in the call center is the real-time display that may be on a wall-mounted light board, a TV screen, or displayed at the agents’ desktops on the phone or PC. This channel is typically used for information that is only seconds old and continually updated. For example, the display may provide information on the number of calls in queue or the latest problem that agents need to be aware of to properly handle customer calls arriving in the next few minutes (such as the location of a power failure for a utility provider).
• **Formal presentation** – Delivery of a formal presentation is generally a combination of a face-to-face communication with written supporting documentation. Presentation graphics, slides, or other charts may also accompany it. This may be used in the call center in weekly meetings with teams or in training programs, for example.

• **Grapevine** – The informal communications channel uses the ever-present grapevine of rumors and generally verbal information passed from one person to another without a formal plan. As the information is passed along it tends to be modified and may lose any resemblance to the original information as each person adds or subtracts based on his/her interpretation and personal biases. While it is possible to use the grapevine as an effective communication channel, it is generally avoided due to the lack of control over the quality of the information and the people who will hear it.

**Communications to Agents**

Communication with agents involves not only the information regarding job performance metrics and achievement of goals, but daily operational data and the constant barrage of changes that must be assimilated each day. Ensuring that agents on all shifts receive the important data along with those who may be absent on any given day is a challenge that requires a thoughtful plan and consistent execution.

**Operational Communications**

One of the most frequent and important communications with agents is the data regarding the schedule. Each agent wants to receive her assignment as early as possible to allow plans for childcare, appointments, and transportation arrangements. Changes to the schedule may be required by the center to adjust to varying call load and staff availability, as well as daily trades of schedules between agents. Keeping the agents and the center informed of all of these changes is a constant challenge. Setting up a process to manage schedule exception reporting is a key task since there can be hundreds of schedule exceptions a day in a large center.

Another constant flow of information is the change data that agents need to know. Distribution of this information can be done verbally, on paper, via e-mail or even voice message. The most effective method depends in part on how long the information is valid and whether it is simple to remember and apply or complex. A temporary system failure may be communicated to the agents via a wall-mounted display since it is usually a simple message of limited duration.

**Performance Communications for Agents**

There are many performance measures that apply to the call center as a whole, some that apply to teams, and those that apply specifically to the agent. The measurements that apply to an individual agent include both quantitative measures as well as some measures that are qualitative in nature.

There are some measures over which the agent has little or no control. It is essential to consider that aspect of each measurement so that agents know whether a measure is within their control and how it can be affected. While it is useful to share other measures
with the team to ensure broad focus on the bigger issues, it is not reasonable to hold agents responsible for them. For example, one metric that agents have little control over is the service level or ASA. If the agents are adhering to their schedules and available when they are meant to be, they cannot be responsible for an unusual call volume or the inability of the WFM team to produce an accurate forecast. The agents need to know how well the center is performing against that goal since it is important to the center overall, but it should not be a metric on the agent’s performance expectations.

**Communications to Teams**

Communications and reporting to teams and supervisors generally include summary results for the agent group that is included in the team. The supervisor needs to see the individual results for each member of the group, and the group averages to make comparisons. In addition, it is often useful to have a report that shows the team’s position relative to the overall center goals and to other teams, especially when some competitive spirit will encourage improved performance.

In general, group summary reports are not sensitive and are less likely to create an emotional response than the individual reports that are used to communicate individual agent performance. Since the individual performance of each person is buried in the totals for the team, no one will be singled out as a great or poor performer. Therefore, these are commonly communicated electronically or posted for all to see either on an intranet or printed and posted on the wall of the center. In some centers, it is accepted practice to post the reports with the agents’ names and individual data, while in others a code is used so that each agent can find his or her own data and see how it compares to the other individuals in the group, but everyone’s privacy is protected.

It is also appropriate to share center-wide information with the supervisors and teams to indicate how well the center is doing in achieving its overall goals. These might include speed of answer, abandon percentage, cost/revenue per call, and customer satisfaction survey results. While individual agents should not be held responsible for these goals, each person plays a role in ensuring that these goals are met. So keeping everyone informed about how well the center is meeting its overall goals helps to build the spirit of teamwork that is essential to the call center’s success. To the extent that an entire call type or work type is controlled within a single team, it is especially appropriate to provide the summary data on that work to the supervisor for that team.

**Communications to Management**

As the reporting and communication process moves to the overall call center level, the data that was provided in detail for teams and individuals is summarized one more time. The data may be sorted in a number of ways including by call or contact type, by shift, by day, by supervisor, and so on. The manager will see the reports sorted with an overall summary for each team or data type and the totals/averages for the entire center. In multi-site operations, the director may see each center separately and rolled-up into a system-wide view. At this point, trend analyses with charts are generally useful to give a graphical overview of the data in a quick-to-read format since tables with lots of numbers are hard to analyze at a glance. Trends over a 12-month period are common, but daily data may be needed to ensure that the details are not buried in the averages. If a change
has taken place that will affect the statistics (such as implementation of a new technology), the change should be noted on the reports to ensure that the impact can be correlated with the trends.

At the center level, it is appropriate to report accessibility goals such as call blockage, and self-service option availability/usage. In addition, speed of answer goals such as service level or ASA, delay percentage, and longest delay before answer or abandon are appropriate reports on a center-wide basis.

Overall speed of answer, delay experiences, and abandon percentages are typically reported at the center level, but for each call or work type separately. As more centers take on electronic work such as e-mails, response time on these transactions will be tracked in much the same manner as the call service levels are today.

The center will track its overall compliance with the operating budget on a monthly basis as a minimum, and capital budgets will be tracked to ensure that the projected return on investment (ROI) results are actually achieved. Many centers track their head-count in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE) to ensure that the center is operating within budget since this is the single biggest component of cost in the center. This involves calculating a forecast of workload for several months into the future and analyzing the utilization of full-time, part-time, contract, and outsourced personnel, along with potential for overtime. Determination of the number of staff on vacation and the overall shrinkage estimates are included in the headcount analysis along with forecasts of training classes and the workload that they may be able to handle.

Self-service utilization is generally tracked at the call center level to determine the trend of IVR and web usage as these are both technologies designed to offload some of the work from the agents. It is useful to correlate the shift in work volumes as these self-service tools are used to see the impact it has on the average handling time of the calls that agents handle.

**Communications to Funders**

In terms of the level of information provided to funders, some may desire all the detailed information being utilized by the call center management team, while others may wish to see only summary information. If summary charts and graphs are acceptable, these will generally focus on trend analysis. However, the call center manager should be prepared with the detailed data that backs up any graph should there be interest in any given statistic.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are often chosen as the report data that is provided to funders. Development of customized reports such as “dashboards” can be very helpful in seeing the important elements of the data quickly. Each funder should specify the reports and level of reporting data desired.
REFERENCES

Books

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*The Survey Research Handbook* by Pamela Alreck and Robert Settle

*A Complaint is a Gift* by Janelle Barlow

*Bringing Out the Best in People* by Aubrey Daniels

*Call Center Staffing: The Complete, Practical Guide to Workforce Management* by Penny Reynolds

*Business School Essentials for Call Center Leaders* by Maggie Klenke

*Call Center Supervision: The Complete Guide for Managing Frontline Staff* by Penny Reynolds

Papers

*Calculating Call Center Telephone Resources*

Link:

*Three Steps for Attacking Call Center Adherence Problems*

Link: